

About 70 community members attended the 3rd community meeting on June 14 to review and comment on the Pro Parks Loyal Heights Playfield Improvement project. Summaries of previous meetings on March 1 and April 26 were available at this meeting and are on the project website. Parks staff included Dennis Cook (Senior Recreation Program Coordinator), Mike Mirante (Athletic Field Coordinator), Cathy Tuttle (Project Planner), and Karen Galt and Ted Holden (Parks Landscape Architects). Renata Prochaska of CTS Engineers in Bellevue also presented the draft Parking study of the site.

Three Project Advisory Team (PAT) meetings were held on June 1 and June 13, and June 22. The Board of Parks Commissioners will hold a public hearing on the project on Thursday, July 14, and discuss the project and make a recommendation on July 28. Parks Superintendent Ken Bounds will make a final decision on the project after receiving the recommendation of the Park Board. The Pro Parks Levy provides \$2,315,658 in project costs for planning, design, and construction. The exact Levy description of the project is: “upgrade and improve play surfaces and field amenities.” The field will be upgraded with synthetic surface in 2006.

The 1997 Joint Athletic Facilities Development Program (JAFDP) identified priority athletic facility projects that would increase the amount of capacity and improve the quality of play on City fields for youth and adults. The 2002 update of the JAFDP looked at ways to increase the scheduling capacity of the City’s athletic fields and examine the field system as a whole in order to make improvements for both field users and neighbors throughout the city. Loyal Heights Playfield was one of the priority projects identified for improvements with the JAFDP. This project will resurface two existing ball fields and the football/soccer field for year-round, all-weather use and improved quality of play. See the JAFDP at the following address: <http://www.seattle.gov/parks/meetings/jafdp/jafdp.htm>

The following are a summary of the spoken and written comments and questions received at the June 14 community meeting.

Reasons for supporting grass or synthetic

In favor of grass

- Several people spoke of this athletic field as a community park that had quiet times – during the winter, on weekends – that were important community times.
- Several said they wanted a local, not a regional facility.
- Several people said they preferred grass for its ecological benefits, particularly as it produced oxygen and supported biotic life. Some wondered if synthetic turf was consistent with Seattle’s “green” policies including green roofs, tree planting.
- People worried that synthetic turf would preclude other uses and that the neighboring community would feel uncomfortable on it.
- People thought there were enough playfields around and that winter athletic fields were unnecessary.
- Some thought that Loyal Heights was a “playfield” not a “sports” fields and not necessarily for athletics
- Some wanted their children to only play on grass.

In favor of synthetic

- Several community members said they or their children were sports field users and were looking forward to an improved field for play.
- One young baseball player said that Loyal Heights has always had a sports field and that the big grass lawn and playground were the place for picnics and grass.
- Synthetic is multi-purpose, can be used for other activities as well
- Ballard Little League and other Ballard sports team representatives said many of their players were playing and could not attend the public meeting. They said there were not enough Ballard fields to play on and that the “endangered species are the kids”
- Soccer and Frisbee players thought synthetic fields were “knee friendly” and looked forward to playing on it with their children.
- People who had played on synthetic said they liked being on it barefoot.
- Football and baseball coaches said they worried about holes in natural turf and looked forward to a field that was safe and usable in all weather and all seasons.
- A resident who is an engineer said that King County put three synthetic fields within 100 yards of salmon stream because the fields improved water quality with no watering, mowing, or fertilizers
- A baseball player said if grass were replanted at Loyal Heights it would be 2 years until she could play on the field.

- One person said she was an enthusiast for more resources available in Ballard and this would provide more resources. She noted that demographic changes are driving a sports focus, not that sports are not driving changes.
- A Ballard Little League coach said she struggles each year to find fields – this is only 90 foot diamond available; and no practice times are available. She said the Challenger's League could play on synthetic turf and this would allow first ever ADA accessible baseball program in Ballard.

Other community comments and questions

- Landscape architect Ted Holden described several of the changes to the design from the previous community meeting and asked for feedback on different fence heights, entry and walkway possibilities, reorienting the soccer field, and a concrete pad for temporary concessions.
- Community asked that Parks confirm there would be no moveable pitcher's mound. Several soccer players asked that the soccer field be kept long. A community member said this was an opportunity to plant more trees and others wondered if the south and east sides of the property could have terraces or vegetation as long as they did not interfere with winter sledding.
- A community member wanted to know if Loyal Heights Playfield would be locked. Ted Holden assured them that the field would never be locked and that fences would be arranged to make the field even more accessible than it is now.
- Several community members wanted to know about field lights. Ted said that a new electrical system would be put in place and new poles, security lights, and field lights would be added as soon as funds were available.
- Several community comments had to do with what happens if fields get vandalized and if they would they be covered by warranty. Others wanted to know how to clean it, especially after the field is used by dogs. Parks will continue to maintain this field.
- Several sports participants wanted to know if markers or stripes for other sports such as Ultimate Frisbee could be added. These ideas will be considered.
- Several community comments had to do with process. Some comments centered on the lack of choice over whether or not the field would be synthetic. Others wanted more compromises such as partial synthetic. Parks staff encouraged community to write or testify to the Park Board as part of the July 14 Public Hearing.
- Several concerns were voiced about the construction process and how traffic and noise would impact the neighborhood during construction. Parks will work with the neighborhood and the contractor to mitigate these impacts.
- Several comments also questioned whether the new field would adequately drain, would open a fill site, and wondered if an impact study of the construction was planned. Parks staff will carefully plan this construction process and will conduct a SEPA analysis prior to starting the project.
- Several comments dealt with current field use: Noise at the field is an issue. Community requested a Parks, not Police phone number to call. Parks needs better enforcement of rules for off-leash, noise, field lights, rowdiness. Make sure neighborhood knows that pesticides aren't used on athletic fields.

Parking and traffic analysis

- Traffic Engineer Renata Prochaska of CTS Engineers presented her draft parking and traffic analysis. She studied traffic at Loyal Heights Playfield on a Saturday morning starting at 8 a.m. when residents were likely to be at home, when both baseball fields were scheduled with multiple games, and the community center was open. She concluded that "The parking situation during these games and activities did not seem to negatively impact the neighborhood parking. The angled parking spaces were not fully occupied at any time and there were a number of empty parking spaces in the surrounding streets."
- One community member noted that Loyal Heights Playfield is the only field under consideration for synthetic that is not on an arterial. Another citizen noted that Ballard has few arterials relative to the rest of the city.
- Parking is a major community issue. Not all residences have off-street parking and many feel the current field use already taxes existing parking options. There is also concern that traffic circulation is poor during evening games. Residents requested additional studies of parking and traffic during evening games which will be carried out.
- Because field use with a synthetic surface is projected to increase from its current 1507 hours to 2573 hours of use, some residents anticipated much more parking pressure. The traffic consultant reported that the rate of field use will remain constant. That is, the field will still be used for one single game at a time, or in the case of Little League, 2 games at a time. No additional fields will be opened. The field will be in winter months where before it was not usable.